

you're my lady, i'm your fool by orphan_account

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Summary:

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That's why it's such a shock when, on the last day of school, Jenny finds him at the front of the building and hands him a slip of paper with seven digits written on it.

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Author's Note:

This is my submission for [Stories From Summer!](#) (#17, drive-in movie night)

This ended up being way different than I planned... It was supposed to be Byler, but now it's just Will being gay, and then there's a tiny hint of Will/OMC. I feel like at this point all I do is write coming out scenes, lmao. Either way, I still had a lot of fun participating, and I hope you enjoy reading!

Jenny is sweet. She wears perfume that comes out with spurts of glitter, so her neck and wrists are always coated in little specks of gold. She applies delicate lines of eyeliner under her eyes, making the green in them pop. She wears a lot of cardigans with shoulder pads, and her hair is always teased to tall, curly perfection. Or so Max says, always with a jealous look on her face.

Will doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about Jenny's hair. He doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about Jenny at all, really. She's in his math class, so sometimes they talk about algebra after class, but he wouldn't consider them friends, or anything. He did dance with her at the last Snowball, but it's not like they're together. Everything had gone back to normal as soon as the slow song ended.

That's why it's such a shock when, on the last day of school, Jenny finds him at the front of the building and hands him a slip of paper with seven digits written on it in careful handwriting. Her cheeks are bright red, and she keeps looking at the ground and then back at him.

It takes a second for Will's brain to catch up. He feels one of his friends' hands at his shoulders, pushing him forward and laughing at him. He'd forgotten that they're all still there, watching the scene unfold.

"Uh, thanks," Will says, smiling at Jenny. He folds the paper in half and tucks it in his pocket.

Out of the corner of his eye, Will can see his friends slowly backing away. Nervously, he says, “Well, uh, I have—to go home. For dinner.”

“Oh,” Jenny says, shrugging. “That’s fine. I just wanted to give you that. Don’t be a stranger!”

She waves at him and returns to her group of friends. Will feels the slip of paper burning a hole in his pocket, and quickly starts walking towards his own traitorous friends. They’re semi-hiding behind a tree, giggling at him as he approaches.

Dustin looks like he’s barely holding something in. His cheeks are puffed out and his eyes are as wide as saucers. It only takes him a moment before he can’t keep it in any longer and he bursts into song. “*Jennyyy* , I got your number! I need to make you *miine* !”

Will can’t help but laugh even as he rolls his eyes.

Lucas hits Dustin’s arm until he stops, while whisper-shouting, “She’s *right* there, man! Shut up!”

Mike throws his arm around Will’s shoulders and puts on the voice of a proud mother as he says, “I never thought I’d see the day that William Byers gets a girlfriend!”

Will doesn’t know if he should be offended by that or not. “She’s not my girlfriend,” he says, but it only makes them tease him harder.

Dustin keeps singing, “Jennyyy don’t change your nuuumber, eight six seven five three oh nine,” as they all walk towards the bike racks.

Will wonders if the sick feeling he has in his stomach is because of the teasing or because of Jenny herself. It has to be the teasing.

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The house is empty when Will gets home. There’s a note on the counter from Joyce, saying that she’s working until late, but that Hopper is coming to check on him and bring him some dinner later.

Will sighs. His mom gets worried about him being alone more than

he himself does. Sometimes shadows still make him jump, and most nights he sleeps with the lights on, but he can still last one evening without being checked up on.

Will takes off his jeans and throws them in the hamper, changing into pajamas. He settles on the couch after flipping the radio on, and wonders how he's going to keep busy this summer. Maybe he should get a job. It would help his mom out, especially now that she's got Jonathan's college bills to worry about on top of everything else. Maybe he could work at the arcade, that way he wouldn't have to sacrifice so much time with his friends, since they're there practically every day anyway.

The radio host finishes talking about the local farmer's market and says, "We've got thirty minutes of uninterrupted music coming up, with Tommy Tutone kicking it off. I think it's safe to say now that they were a one hit wonder, but *man* is it a good song."

The first notes of *Jenny* start playing, and Will laments his entire life.

He should call her, though. Or is it too soon? It's been less than an hour since she gave him the note. He should wait. Right? Or should he just get it over with? Yes. He should call.

Will pinches his arm in an attempt to calm himself down. He stands up and paces the room, glancing at the phone on the wall, then at the hamper where the note is lying, then at the radio that's still playing *Jenny*.

Somehow, he ends up with the phone in his hand before he can think about it any further. He dials the numbers carefully and then holds it to his ear with shaky hands. He twirls the cord around his finger and listens to it ring.

"Hello?" A male voice says.

"Hello," Will says quietly. "Um. Is this Jenny's house?"

"Yeah, just a second," the guy says. Distantly, he yells, "Jenny! There's a *boy* on the phone!"

It takes a second, but then the phone gets jostled around and Jenny's

voice comes through. “Hey! I didn’t think you’d call so soon, Zombie Boy.”

Will still feels weird about her calling him that. “Sorry, is that okay?” he asks.

“Yeah, I’m glad you did,” she says. “I want to get to know you better.”

Will nods and then remembers she can’t see him. “Right, yeah, me too.”

“Cool,” she giggles. There’s a pause, and then she says, “ *Ugh* —Chris, get off the line! I can hear you breathing!”

Chris cackles loudly and then hangs up his line.

Jenny sighs. “Sorry. Nosy brothers, you know.”

“Yeah,” Will says, although he can’t imagine Jonathan ever listening in on his conversations. He’s good like that.

“Are you busy tomorrow?” Jenny asks.

Will had been planning on going to Mike’s for the night, but Mike would probably kill him if he denied hanging out with Jenny because of him. “Uh, no,” Will says. “Do you want to do something?”

Jenny giggles again. “Okay,” she says quietly. “You pick the place—surprise me. Just call me tomorrow and tell me what to wear and where to meet you.”

Will’s eyes widen, and he wants to protest, but Jenny is already saying, “Okay, I have to go now, but I’ll see you tomorrow!”

Will stares down at the phone for a while after she hangs up. He isn’t completely sure what just happened. He has a date? With Jenny? And he has to come up with something to do before tomorrow?

He wants to call Mike immediately, but something stops him. He doesn’t know if he wants to tell his friends yet, just in case none of this pans out the way it’s supposed to. Jenny could still be asking him

out as a joke—it wouldn't be the first time someone's done that to Will. Of course, his friends would never make fun of him for that, but their sympathy is almost worse. He's worked so hard to get them to treat him the same way they did before the Upside Down happened, and he doesn't want to turn it around again.

He's just decided that he won't tell them yet, not until he's gone out with Jenny and decided whether she's genuine or not, when he hears Hopper's keys knocking against the lock on the front door. He'll ask Hopper. Hopper will know—he went out with plenty of girls in high school.

"Hey, kid," Hopper greets him once he gets the door open. He sets a pan of food down on the table and takes his shoes off. "El wanted to make a casserole recipe she saw in a magazine, so don't blame me if it's bad."

Will grins when he peels back the tinfoil to see a slightly charred, overly cheesy green bean casserole. "Looks great," he says. "Where is she?"

"At Mike's," Hopper searches for a knife and starts cutting it into slices. "How was the last day of school?"

"It was good," Will says, setting two plates down on the table. Hopper spoons out the casserole and takes a seat across from Will. "Um, actually—Um."

Hopper raises his eyebrows minutely.

"There's this, um, girl? She gave me her number..." Will says. He watches Hopper's eyebrows raise even further. "She wants me to surprise her, but I don't know what to do."

Hopper scratches his beard and says, "Alright. Well, what does she like?"

Will wracks his memory for something Jenny might have said that would hint towards what she does with her free time, but he can't think of anything. He's pretty sure they've only talked about math with each other. "I don't know, that's the problem," Will says. "We're

not even friends, really.”

“But you like her?” Hopper asks.

Deciding to be honest, Will shrugs. “I don’t know. Not really. But she’s still sort of a stranger, so maybe...”

Hopper takes a massive bite of casserole and puts his thinking face on. After he’s done chewing, he says, “She can’t be expecting much if you kids don’t even know each other. Just take her to the movies or something.”

Will vaguely remembers her mentioning that she loves Star Wars. The Hawk never replays them, but the drive-in theater on the edge of town always has one of them going. Will can’t drive, though.

It’s a big favor to ask of Hopper, but Will doesn’t know how else he could get a car. None of his friends drive either, Joyce is always working during the day, and Jonathan, the first person he’d want to ask, is miles and miles away.

“Are you working tomorrow?” Will asks hesitantly.

Hopper sighs gruffly, but says, “Nah, you can borrow my car.”

“You trust me driving it?” Will asks, his eyes wide. He only meant to ask if Hopper would drop them off at the drive-in and pick them up after.

“I’ve seen your mom teachin’ you,” Hopper says. “You’re careful enough.”

Careful enough is an understatement. Will always checks the tires and mirrors before he drives, doesn’t go a single tick above or below the speed limit, and he starts slowing down for a stop sign nearly a mile away. It drives everyone else crazy, but Will would much rather be alive and late to something than dead and on time.

“You won’t arrest me for driving without a license?” Will asks, mostly joking. “No one else will arrest me for stealing a cop car?”

Hopper laughs, shaking his head. “Those guys wouldn’t pull anyone

over if a *dog* was driving my car. Too much paperwork.”

Will laughs too, and then finally takes a bite of the casserole. It isn’t as bad as it looks.

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The next morning, Will calls Mike and pretends that he isn’t feeling well enough to hang out today. Mike seems suspicious, but he doesn’t object. Will hangs up the phone quickly because he knows if he talks to his best friend for too long, he’ll spill everything. And he wants to keep this one to himself, at least for a little while.

He calls Jenny next, his heart pounding as he tells her he’ll pick her up at six, that she should just wear normal clothes, and that she shouldn’t bring any money. She calls him “Zombie Boy” again in an excited tone.

Will spends the rest of his day watching anything and everything that’s on TV, eating snacks, and desperately not thinking about his date. When Joyce comes home after her double shift, she’s too exhausted to notice anything is weird about him, so he isn’t forced to lie. She kisses him on the forehead and shuffles off to bed. After just a couple hours, she’s up and getting dressed for her second job, at the diner. Again, Will thinks about getting himself a job, and decides that he’ll start applying for one sometime this week.

Hopper drives the car over around five, and then asks if Will has enough time to drive him back home first. Will does have the time, but it’s nerve-wracking enough to drive Hopper’s car, let alone with him *in it* . Still, he agrees, because otherwise Hopper will have to walk all the way home, and that would surely mean Hopper would never let him borrow his car again. The drive goes okay—he’s still a little jerky when he picks up speed after a stop, but he’s passable. Hopper isn’t white-knuckling the armrest, so Will thinks he’s good enough.

Then finally Will is alone again as he drives towards the address Jenny had given him this morning. He cranks the radio up, expecting music, but he’s met with police chatter instead. He keeps it on anyway, because it’s still better than the spiraling thoughts in his

head.

Jenny is already waiting outside when he pulls into the driveway. Even in the setting sun, it's too hot for her to wear her usual cardigans. She's traded it out for a soft pink dress with a blue belt wrapped around her waist. Her hair is, of course, "teased to perfection". She's done her makeup and everything, putting delicate smudges of pink over her cheekbones and nose. Her lips are glossy too, and for one *strange* moment, Will thinks that's probably a good thing, because she won't try to kiss him and mess up her makeup. He doesn't know why he thought that.

"I didn't know you could drive," she says when she hops into the passenger seat.

"Uh, I can't really," Will says. "I mean, I *can* , I don't have my license though."

"Ooh, rebel," Jenny grins, clicking her seatbelt. "You know, I heard rumors that the police chief was dating your mom, but I guess this proves it."

Will hadn't given much thought to what Jenny would think when she saw him rolling up to her house in a police cruiser. "They aren't actually dating," Will says. "They're just really close. But when my mom doesn't have to work so much, they'll probably go out."

"Huh," Jenny says, glancing around the car curiously. "Well, it's unique, anyway."

Will focuses on the road, trying to be cautious because it's getting dark, but not so cautious that he'll look like a loser. Though he supposes Jenny already knows that about him, on account of the whole Zombie Boy thing.

"You look nice," Will says, when he remembers that he's supposed to say things like that.

Jenny blushes and smooths her dress out in her lap. "Thank you."

It's a little awkward after that. Neither of them know what to say, but then they'll both come up with a topic of conversation and

accidentally interrupt each other. “Sorry, you first,” Will says after his question of, *What are your summer plans?* gets interrupted by her question of *Do you have any pets?*

“Oh, just,” Jenny giggles. “Wondered if you had any pets.”

“I used to have a dog, but,” he trails off. While Will was in the Upside Down, Chester had gotten lost, and everyone had been preoccupied with bigger things. Will likes to imagine that Chester got found by a nice family with a huge backyard and plenty of chew toys, rather than—the alternative. “Anyway, what about you?”

Jenny looks like she regrets bringing it up. “We have two cats, Blue and Ricotta.”

“Like the cheeses?” Will laughs.

“Yeah, it’s a long story,” Jenny says. “Well, not really. Blue is white with grey-ish spots, and Ricotta is because he always licks the ricotta bowl clean when we make lasagna, but he doesn’t touch any other kind of cheese.”

“Cute,” Will says. They’re getting closer to the drive-in, but they’re a little early, so they’ll have to kill about a half hour before the movie starts. He’s already nervous about it.

“Oh, but my summer,” Jenny says. “I don’t really have any plans. I’m taking a trip to Chicago with my family in a few weeks, but that’s it. I might get a job just to pass the time.”

“Me too,” Will says, wincing when he clips the curb on a turn. “The job thing, I mean, not the Chicago trip.”

“Really?” Jenny’s eyes light up. “We could work together! Where are you applying?”

Will wishes he hadn’t said anything. “Um, I don’t know yet.”

“Well, let me know when you decide,” she says. “It would make work a lot more fun, don’t you think?”

Will nods. He thinks about working at the arcade, seeing all his

friends every day, and then he thinks about Jenny being there with him. There's nothing wrong with Jenny—she's sweet and she's cute and she isn't even boring to talk to. But either way, imagining himself spending hours upon hours with her makes Will's skin crawl, and he doesn't know why. Except he sort of does. But he isn't thinking about that right now.

They pull up to the drive-in right as the sun dips under the horizon. At the gate, Will buys two tickets for *Return of the Jedi*, and Jenny sends him a smile that's filled with a lot of heart-eyes, so he figures he made a good choice. There are spray-painted lines on the grass that mark where people are allowed to park, so Will takes one near the front row, far away from any cars that he may possibly hit. He may be good at driving, but he hasn't exactly gotten a handle on parking yet. He only realizes, after the fact, what kind of impression he might be giving Jenny.

There are nothing but tall, private bushes to their left side, the huge screen in front, and the nearest car is at least four spaces away. This is where people park when they plan on ignoring the movie and making out the entire time.

"Oh, I didn't mean—" Will starts to explain, but Jenny just shakes her head and giggles.

"That's okay," she says. "Let's go buy some popcorn."

It turns out that Jenny brought money anyway, which she slaps down on the counter before Will can even reach for the wallet in his pocket. It's probably a good thing anyway, because Jenny ends up ordering a big tub of popcorn, a drink for each of them, and four different kinds of candy. He wouldn't have been able to afford that, and it'd have been humiliating to ask her to put anything back. Still, it doesn't make him feel much better to know that his date, his first one, in fact, is paying for him.

The boy working the "Snack Shack" is in the same grade as Will and Jenny, which makes the whole ordeal even more embarrassing. He looks between them inquisitively for a moment, and then his bored expression slips back on as he tells Jenny her total.

Jenny happily munches on popcorn as they walk back towards the car. She throws one up into the air and Will tries to catch it in his mouth. He fails, so she tries again until, after seven tries, he gets it.

“You did it!” she says in that voice people usually reserve for babies or dogs.

Will laughs while he chews it. They get in the car and turn the radio to the right channel, which is playing nothing but ads for now. Will doesn’t go to the drive-in much—he’s only been once, actually, when his dad was feeling bad for not seeing him much, so he took him to see *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Will thought it was impressive then, and still does, how the sound comes in through your own stereo.

Will is tempted to turn the radio off until the movie starts, but even ads are better than silence between them. He tries to think of something to say—something he’d say to one of his friends, but he’s a little caught up on the fact that this is a date. It’s supposed to be romantic. They’re parked in the most romantic spot of the entire drive-in theater, which, in and of itself, is the most romantic spot in Hawkins. Will has no idea what he’s supposed to say to make any of this feel romantic.

“You look really nice,” he says, and then feels like a loser, because he’s already told her that.

“Thanks,” she says again, with the same blush on her cheeks. “How’d you know I liked *Star Wars*?”

Everyone likes Star Wars, Will almost says. “I remember you mentioned it before,” he actually says. It will make all of this seem thoughtful and romantic, he hopes.

She ducks her head and smiles at him, which he thinks means he said the right thing.

“I heard your friends singing that *Jenny* song yesterday,” she says with a grin. “They seem cool.”

“I bet you don’t hear that joke every day,” Will says, wishing he’d get sucked into the Upside Down right then and there.

"It's alright," she says. "I *did* give you my number. I was kind of asking to get made fun of."

They both stare ahead at the still-blank screen, listening to the ads.

"How long 'til the movie starts?" Jenny asks.

Will glances at the time and says, "Twenty more minutes."

Jenny nods, tapping her fingers on her thigh. Then she pushes the armrests up, and Will knows what she's doing, but he still somehow manages to be shocked when she leans forward and plants her glossy, wet lips on his. He's frozen, and he's internally kicking himself for just sitting there, like a *loser*, but all he can think about is how glossy her lips are, and how that doesn't feel right.

He takes too long, but eventually he kisses her back. He gets lipgloss smeared all over his face, and he still feels a little frozen inside, even if his lips did unthaw. He's afraid that if he puts his hands in Jenny's hair, they'll get all tangled and stuck, so he keeps them awkwardly at his sides.

After a moment, Jenny pulls away. She wipes Will's mouth with the back of her hand and frowns, her face tomato red. "I'm sorry," she says, almost in a whisper. "I feel like that wasn't good."

Will blinks. It takes everything in his power not to look out the window again, but he thinks that would be pretty rude considering they just kissed and everything. "It's—it wasn't bad," Will says, which he immediately realizes was the wrong thing to say.

"I'm sorry!" she says again. "I should have listened to my friends. They *told* me it's weird that I always make the first move, but I did it anyway."

"No, it isn't that," Will says desperately. He doesn't want her thinking she's the reason why it went wrong, when clearly Will is just—screwed up, or something. "I didn't mind. It's just—I—"

He wants to say that he was just surprised, that it was his first kiss, that he'd like to kiss her again, that he's sorry their first one was so bad—but none of the words are coming out, and he suddenly feels

like he swallowed a handful of rocks.

“Oh. I think I get it.” Jenny says.

Get what? Will wants to ask, but he can’t manage the words.

The ads switch over to the opening notes of the Star Wars theme song, but neither of them pay it any attention. They’re missing the whole intro, not that it really matters. Will has a feeling they won’t be staying for the rest of the movie.

“Will,” Jenny says, slow and so quiet, with intense eyes. “Are you—”

Will can hardly breathe, hardly think, but he knows he doesn’t want Jenny to finish her sentence. So he does all he can do, and kisses her again.

If their first kiss was bad... Will doesn’t know what to call this one. Monumentally horrible, maybe. Even that doesn’t seem strong enough. The angle’s all wrong, their teeth knock together, Will gets a mouthful of Jenny’s lipgloss, and now Jenny’s the one who’s frozen.

“I’m so sorry,” Will says, mortified with himself. He realizes he still has to drive Jenny home, and he genuinely would rather be eaten by a demogorgon. “Why did I do that? Oh my god.”

“Will, it’s okay!” she insists, wiping her mouth, which doesn’t do much good because her hand is still covered in gloss from when she did the same to Will’s lips. “It’s okay if you’re—You know,” she says, avoiding the word, probably more for Will’s sake than her own. “I don’t care! I mean, I probably wouldn’t have kissed you if I knew, but —It’s fine!”

The first time Will’s dad ever called him a queer, it was when he was five and he was telling his family about the cute boy he met at recess that day. He only said it because he’d heard a girl in his class call Mike cute, and, well, Mike *was* cute. Lonnie had muttered, *fucking queer already*, under his breath, and Will had innocently asked, “What’s queer?” The only answer he got was Joyce looking straight at Lonnie and saying, “It’s a horrible swear word and I don’t ever want to hear it again.”

It was so decidedly *not fine* to be gay. Even though he stopped caring what his dad thinks of him a long time ago, he can't bear the thought of Lonnie being right. Of every bully he's ever had being *right* .

"Shit," Jenny says. "I'm so sorry, Will. I didn't mean for this to happen. I won't tell anyone, you don't have to worry about that."

"Thanks," Will squeaks out. He doesn't know what else to say to her now that she knows something about him that he'd pushed down so deep that he hadn't even known it about *himself* . Jenny knows before his mom does, before Jonathan, before Mike, before his closest friends in the world. That's so *wrong* .

"Maybe we should just go?" Jenny suggests. "I'm sorry this turned out so badly."

"No, it's okay," Will says. "I mean—it's not your fault, it's all mine. *I'm* sorry."

If either of them say they're sorry one more time, Will thinks he'll explode. He just wants to go home and bury himself under the blankets and never talk to anyone *ever* again.

Will takes a deep breath to collect himself and then starts the car again. He backs out of the drive-in ever so slowly, creeping across the grass. He only starts to pick up speed once he's on a straight path toward the gate. The woman inside seems confused, but opens the gate for him anyway. As soon as they're back on the street, the signal fades and the radio turns to static. Will is too focused on the road to change it, but Jenny turns it to the pop hits station, and Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go starts blasting through the car. Jenny lets it play for a moment, and then turns it down so she can say, "You know, I kinda get that *feeling* from George Michael too."

"What feeling?" Will asks.

"You know. That feeling," she says. She lowers her voice even though there's no one there to hear them. "That he's gay."

Will grips the steering wheel tighter. He's trying to be okay with her saying things like that to him, just like her calling him Zombie Boy,

but he doesn't know if he is okay with it. Maybe not yet, anyway. They aren't even friends.

"But he says *you're my lady* , in the song," Will says meekly.

She giggles, "Yeah, but why would he say *you're my man* on the radio? Doesn't even fit the rhythm."

He guesses she has a point. And it sort of helps to talk about it without *talking* about it. It makes him feel almost normal. He thinks of George Michael actually being gay and he can't help but laugh. *Yeah, right* . No man who does that well with women could be gay.

The song finishes, leading into something neither of them have heard before. Will can feel Jenny's eyes on him. He wants to snap, ' *what?*' but that would be unnecessarily rude. So he waits, and drives, and finally she opens her mouth, "We can still be friends, right? I mean—I like you. Obviously nothing's gonna happen there, but I still think we clicked, you know?"

Will isn't sure if he'd say they *clicked* , but without the pressure of knowing this was a first date, Will thinks they could have. He says, "Yeah, I'd like that."

Jenny smiles. The radio starts playing Madonna's new song, and she gleefully belts it out. Jenny's timing is all messed up, but she makes up for it in sheer volume.

Before long, Will is pulling into Jenny's driveway again. All the lights are on in the living room, and he can see Jenny's parents peering through the curtains worriedly. Right, because Jenny isn't supposed to be home yet, and now there's a police cruiser at their house.

"I'll tell them I ate too much popcorn and got sick," she says, grabbing at her stomach and frowning. She's actually pretty good at acting. "Well, uh. Thanks for taking me to the movies," she says with a small giggle. "Maybe next time we'll actually watch it. Oh, you can keep the popcorn too."

Will feels guilty all over again. He's a second away from wondering if he could just kiss her again—maybe the third time's the charm, and

he'd be fixed—but then Jenny says, “Hey, I just want to say... Don't feel bad, okay? I'm not upset about tonight. You are who you are, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. But, anyway. I'll see you around, Zombie Boy.”

She hops out of the car with her three boxes of candy tucked under her arm, putting a mask of illness over her face as she approaches the front door. Will waits until she's inside before he starts to back out. He nearly hits the mailbox, but he makes it out okay in the end.

He tries to focus on the radio instead of his own thoughts, but all that's on is I Want To Know What Love Is, which only makes him feel worse.

He knew that it didn't feel right when Jenny gave him her phone number. God, he knew it didn't feel right when she asked him to dance at the Snowball last year. But he still said yes, both times, in the hopes that some kind of switch would go off in his brain and he'd start feeling normal, like everyone else. And he knows by now, thanks to Jonathan, that being normal isn't everything. But *this*, this is beyond being the weird kid, the kid who gets teased a lot. Thinking about Jonathan makes his heart feel heavy—what would he say about this? If anyone were going to accept Will, he thinks Jonathan would be that person. But what if he's not? What if everything changes? What if Jenny, practically a *stranger*, is the only person who will still treat Will the same?

Will pulls the car over somewhere on the main road and slams his head on the steering wheel. He does everything he can to avoid crying—he still has to give Hopper his car back, and he'd really rather not talk about this disaster of a night—but the tears squeeze out anyway. He can still taste Jenny's lipgloss, despite how many times he angrily runs his sleeve over his mouth. He feels like a complete mess, and he probably looks like one too. He's thinking about Jonathan saying, “Being a freak is the best,” but then his face morphs and he adds, “But not if you're queer.”

It's ridiculous and it would never happen like that, Will knows. But in the silence of the night, it's all he can imagine. He wants to go home and call Jonathan, but Jonathan will know something is wrong the instant he hears him say *hello*. For a brief moment, Will thinks that

he'll have to ask Jenny to teach him some acting techniques, because he's tired of isolating himself so he doesn't expose his own biggest secrets.

He can't drop the car off yet. The movie should still have another hour on it, plus driving time. If he showed up at Hopper's now, he'd be met with questions. And he can't pretend he ate too much candy.

He drives around town for a while, unsure what he's looking for. He doesn't know what he wants. He doesn't know if he would rather be alone or talk to someone, or if he wants to go home or go somewhere else.

He eventually decides to stop into the ice cream shop at the end of the main road. It takes him three tries to parallel park, but he gets it eventually. He walks straight to the counter without looking around him, and orders a peanut butter hot fudge sundae. He's about to sit down with his sundae when he hears, "Will?"

Because *of course* this would happen.

Will turns to see all of his friends, every single one of them, crowded into the corner booth. And Will has got lip gloss all over his face, his eyes are rimmed red, and he's ordering a sundae alone like a *loser* after he told Mike he was too sick to hang out tonight.

Mike shimmies his way out of the booth, his eyebrows knitted in worry. "Will?" he says, putting a hand on his shoulder. It burns hot and Will wants to shrug it off. "I thought you were sick, or we would've invited you, obviously."

"It's okay," Will forces himself to say. At least he does look sick for real now.

"Here, come sit with us," Mike says. El squeezes herself next to the wall, creating a tiny spot for Will on the end of the row next to Mike, and across from Max, Lucas, and Dustin.

"Shit, Will, you look horrible," Dustin says, ever so eloquent.

Will ducks his head, mixing his sundae together until it's all one melted mess.

“Really, Will, are you okay?” Mike asks. “How did you even get here?”

“I—” Will can’t think of a lie. “Hopper’s car.”

“He drove you?” Mike asks. “Why?”

“No, I, I drove myself.”

Without looking, he knows his friends are all having silent conversations with each other about him. “Will,” Max says quietly. “Did you steal Hopper’s car?”

“No!” Will groans, shoving a huge spoonful of ice cream in his mouth because he can feel the words slipping out, he knows it’s just a matter of time before — “He let me borrow his car so I could take Jenny to the drive-in!”

“ *What?* ” Mike says. “Why didn’t you just tell us that? That’s awesome, Will. How’d it go? Why didn’t you bring her here with you?”

It’s too much all at once. Will’s tongue feels like a brick in his mouth, but somehow he still feels the urge to tell them everything.

“I’m—It didn’t work out,” Will says. He desperately shovels his sundae into his mouth.

“But she’s so hot!” Dustin cries.

“And her hair’s so nice!” Max says.

“Did you pay for everything?” Mike says, as if he knows anything about dating. He’s lucky he has El, who is just as clueless as Mike is.

Lucas and El stay quiet, but even they look confused.

“Stop,” Will says weakly, his spoon clinking in his bowl as he finishes the last of his ice cream. Shit, now what will he stop himself from talking with?

“Sorry,” Mike says. “I’m sure you did everything right. Sometimes

people just aren't right for each other."

Will's brain feels about as cold as the ice cream did, and his hands are shaking, and he's afraid he might burst into tears again. "She kissed me and I hated it," he says against his own will. "She was so nice, and pretty, but I hated it."

He tucks his head inside his arms on top of the sticky table, so he doesn't have to see their faces. He doesn't know why he's telling them this, but he thinks it was a long time coming anyway. He may have only admitted it to himself a few hours ago, but he thinks he's known forever—or at least since the day Lonnie first called him a queer.

"So... Maybe you're not into her?" Lucas chips in, while everyone else stays silent.

Will shakes his head, his face still buried in the ditch of his elbow.

Mike says with a hushed voice, "Maybe you're not... Into girls?"

Will flinches, gives it a moment, and then nods slowly. He hears his friends murmuring to each other, but he can't decipher what they're saying. And then he feels Mike's hand on his shoulder. "We don't care about that," Mike says. "Right, guys?"

Will's heart skips a beat and then triples in speed. He lifts his head and meets Mike's eyes which are shining with pride, and Will feels so warm inside. His friends all talk over each other, agreeing with Mike and reassuring him that it's okay, that he's still *Will*, and, from Dustin: that they can still have sleepovers in their underwear, and it's okay if Will stares at him, because he knows his body is irresistible. (That earns him a smack from Lucas, but a laugh from Will.)

Will is lucky, he knows. A lot of people don't get this reaction. And the truth is, he's *terrified* of having to confess this secret again and again and again, his entire life, to anyone he meets and who is worthy of knowing this about him. He's sure he'll have bad reactions. Maybe even from people he cares about, people he loves. But his best friends in the entire world know now, and they don't *care*. They think he's the same person he was just a few hours ago— *was it really*

just a few hours ago? —and that nothing has changed between them. In his wildest dreams, he couldn't have hoped for a better reaction than this.

"I love you guys," Will says, blushing. "Really, I—Just, thank you."

Max tries to lean across the table to hug Will, but she ends up knocking her milkshake over and shrieking. It effectively ruins the moment, but Will is laughing too hard to care.

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A week after their disastrous date, Will calls Jenny. Her brother, Chris, picks up again, although he's slightly more serious than he was the first time. Of course he is, because he thinks that Will dropped Jenny off early and never called her again. Which he *did*, technically, but...

"Hi, is Jenny there?" Will says after Chris greets him.

"Yeah," Chris answers. "Why?"

"Oh, um," Will pauses. "Well, I wanted to talk to her about something."

He hears Jenny's voice on the other line, yelling at Chris to give her the phone. There's a struggle, and a lot of shuffling around, but then Jenny triumphantly says, "Hi, Will!"

Will laughs. "Hey, Jenny."

"I'm glad you called," she says. "I was about to call you yesterday, but I thought I should probably wait for you to do it first. I don't want to bother you or anything."

"No, it's okay," Will says. "So, um—I'm sorry, again. That wasn't how I wanted everything to happen. But also, thank you? I don't even know how long I would've kept lying to myself if I never tried it."

"My kiss was so bad it turned you gay," Jenny says solemnly. When Will tries to protest, she laughs and says, "I'm kidding! Stop apologizing, I'm *fine*. I'm happy for you."

Will smiles. "Cool," he says. Then he hears a third person breathing on the line and says, "Um, is that your brother?"

"Oh, for fuck's sake— *Chris ! Go away !*"

"But you didn't tell me that!" Chris cries. "Wait, I'm serious—"

Chris' line gets cut off, but Will still hears him faintly in the background. Jenny is furiously whispering something to him, and he's whispering back, and then he's gone, and Jenny is saying to Will, "Hey, so, don't be surprised if my brother tries to be your friend or something. He's never met another gay person before."

"Another?" Will squeaks. Chris is in the year above them, he's on the basketball team, he's tall, he's popular, and he couldn't possibly be gay.

"Yeah," Jenny says. "I can tell him not to talk to you, if you want me to. I know he seems really obnoxious, but he listens to me when I'm being serious."

Will stutters out, "You don't have to, uh, tell him not to. It's okay."

"Okay," Jenny says with a hint of laughter in her voice. "Well, thanks for calling me. We can still hang out sometime, right?"

"Yeah, of course," Will says. "Actually, I wanted to tell you that Family Video is hiring. If you still wanted to work together, I mean. I get it if you don't."

Will had tried applying at the arcade, but they told him they've already hired their summer workers. Family Video is right next door, though, and it would be nice to get a discount, since he and his friends are always renting a million movies a week.

"Oh, Family Video might be fun!" Jenny says. "Are you busy tomorrow? We can go and give them our resumes."

"Sure, we can do that," Will says.

"And I can tell you *all* about Chris," she teases.

Will blushes, but doesn't object. He has to admit that it would be really nice to know someone else who's in the same boat as he is—and it helps that he's cute.

"I'll see you tomorrow, then," Jenny says brightly. "And I'm proud of you, Zombie Boy."

Will hangs up the phone and smiles. He's proud of himself too.

Works inspired by this one:

- [Summer Nights](#) by [asexualjuliet](#)